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ANDREW WYETH (1917-2009)
ICE STORM



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Price Realized

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- **\$989,000** [Set Currency](#)

Estimate

- \$600,000 - \$800,000

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- 21 May 2015
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Lot Description

Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009)

Ice Storm

signed 'Andrew Wyeth' (upper right)

drybrush, watercolor and gouache on paper

28 ³/₄ x 22 ³/₄ in. (73 x 57.8 cm.)

Executed in 1971.

Provenance

The artist.

Coe Kerr Gallery, New York.

Mr. Frederic C. Church, Boston, Massachusetts, 1971.

Christie's, New York, 25 May 1989, lot 407.

David S. Ramus, Ltd., Atlanta, Georgia, acquired from the above.

Acquired by the present owner by 1995.

Literature

"42 New Paintings Exhibited at Brandywine Museum," *Delaware County Daily Times*, June 18, 1971, p. 27, illustrated.

T. Hoving, A. Wyeth, *Andrew Wyeth: Autobiography*, Boston, Massachusetts, 1995, p. 89, illustrated.

A.C. Knutson, *Andrew Wyeth: Memory & Magic*, Atlanta, Georgia, 2005, p. 82n129.

B. Ross, "Figureless Landscape: The Persistence of the Sublime in American Landscape Painting," *Venturing Upon Dizzy Heights: Lectures and Essays on Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts*, New York, 2008, p. 70.

Exhibited

Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, Brandywine River Museum, *Brandywine Heritage*, June 19-October 17, 1971, illustrated.

Tokyo, The National Museum of Modern Art, and elsewhere, *Andrew Wyeth*, April 6-May 19, 1974, no. 81, illustrated.

Nagoya, Japan, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, and elsewhere, *Andrew Wyeth Retrospective*, February 3-April 2, 1995, pp. 118-19, 242, 257, 269, no. 75, illustrated.

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Lot Notes

Throughout his career, Andrew Wyeth remained loyal to the people in his immediate surroundings, rarely ever traveling beyond the environs of mid-coast Maine and Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. This devotion to location and subject allowed Wyeth to completely immerse himself in his art, lending sincerity to his painting style without being sentimental. Yet, even while depicting personal friends and places, Wyeth remains the impartial spectator, creating narratives that are deeply charged with his own emotion but also open to the viewer's interpretation.

In the present work, *Ice Storm*, Wyeth has chosen a compelling perspective to render the scene. Within a stark interior he depicts Johnny Lynch, a neighbor who occasionally modeled for Wyeth, with a sense of ease and reverence not only for the man himself, but for the spirit he embodies. Without explicitly representing the landscape of Pennsylvania, Wyeth hints at the exterior wilderness that consumed him and helped shape the character of his family, friends and subjects throughout his storied career. The artist simply comments of the present work: "Black-haired Johnny Lynch in the studio in Pennsylvania looking, broodingly, out of the window as the sleet strikes outside. Seemed to sum up Pennsylvania to me." (as quoted in *Andrew Wyeth: Autobiography*, Boston, Massachusetts, 1995, p. 89)

The use of Johnny Lynch as a solitary figure inspires a poignant narrative without expressly depicting the world beyond the window. This motif of a solitary figure placed within an interior is "a pictorial convention of old New England--to express nineteenth-century values of self-reliance and independence." (A. Knutson, "Andrew Wyeth's Language of Things," *Andrew Wyeth: Memory and Magic*, exhibition catalogue, Atlanta, Georgia, 2005, p. 67) By painting Johnny alone and in profile, Wyeth expands the physical picture plane and, more significantly, explores the potential for a broader narrative away from what is actually depicted within the center of the composition, making the entire scene deeply psychological. The lowered point of view, coupled with Johnny's expectant profile outwards, further detaches Wyeth from the scene, allowing the viewer to directly engage the composition as a whole, completely unbiased by the artist. The formal and spatial limitations of the picture edge are deliberately further explored by Wyeth through the compositional device of the window; at once both a barrier and an

opening to the world, the window protects from outside elements yet at the same time provides a view beyond the constraints of the walls. This dichotomy implied by the window is a hallmark of Wyeth's best works and even the cornerstone of a recent exhibition, *Andrew Wyeth: Looking Out, Looking In* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2014).

In *Ice Storm*, the scene Wyeth has presented is intimate, not grand, and this intimacy lends itself to an honesty and immediacy in his depiction. The solitude and overall quietness of the image underscore the simplicity of life inherent in so many of the people and subjects that capture Wyeth's imagination. Additionally, Wyeth exquisitely uses delicate light and rigorous brushwork to illuminate and play with movement in the composition. While perhaps initially seen as a lonely narrative, there is in fact a sense of optimism expressed in Lynch's expression and heightened by the intense light cast on his face. The deceptively empty interior is actually rendered with a sophisticated use of drybrush, watercolor and gouache, which lends a tangible quality of life, texture and even smell to the scene. The folds and fabric of the blue denim shirt take on a sculptural presence against the richly textured wall, composed with daring broad washes of pigment, saturated interior planes and animated surfaces underscored by the artist's brush hairs embedded in the paint layer. Each purposeful dash of pigment builds a complex scene that reveals Wyeth's deep visual and psychological understanding of his environment and friends. "Art, to me, is seeing," Wyeth has said. "I think you have got to use your eyes as well as your emotion, and one without the other just doesn't work. That's my art." (as quoted in *Two Worlds of Andrew Wyeth: Kuerners and Olsons*, p. 185)

This work will be included in Betsy James Wyeth's forthcoming *catalogue raisonné* of the artist's work.

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